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ABSTRACT

There exists a question as to whether United States society and its agricultural system will continue to follow the long-term trend of Western civilization or move in a new direction. The "modernization trend" of Western civilization has 4 components: scientification of knowledge, secularization of human values, industrialization of human activity, and, most importantly, economic rationality. This trend greatly contrasts a potential cultural transformation characterized by greater insistence on self-determination, greater emphasis on the quality of life, a movement toward "appropriate technology", greater acceptance of an ecological ethic, and a widespread search for transcendental meanings. Among the many challenges to this new movement are some relevant to rural life: overwhelming world food problems and the exodus from cities. If agriculture follows this new direction, there will be smaller and small aglomerations of farms, smaller communities located near food production, and more participation in food production. If, however, rural agriculture follows the trend of Western civilization, the results will be fewer and fewer farmers, larger and larger farms, a growing dominance of economics over rural life, and institutionalized agriculture. In the very near future, agriculture will be characterized by both trends. (SB)

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DOES MOTHER NATURE REALLY SELL MARGARINE?: THE UNCERTAIN RURAL FUTURE

In a recent issue of the San Francisco Chronicle, there was reported a debate between the Secretary of the Interior and a California farmer. It took place in the context of a hearing on the proposed rules limiting the size of farms watered by federal water projects.

> L.C. Turnquist, a farmer from Tranquillity in Fresno county told the subcommitee (sic.) the reclamation reform efforts are "a cruel joke." He said "economics must be the final judge to determine who farms the agricultural lands of the United States and not some group of bleeding hearts trying to create a social experiment."
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> But Andrus said the objective of the reclamation law is to create family farms "not opportunities for speculation and profiteering." He said Congress should enact a law "to provide homes, jobs and a decent way of life. It should protect the rights and opportunities of future generations and not enrich the wrong people today."
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> S.F. Chronicle, April 14, 1978

It is quite clear that each of these advocates sees a very different desirable rural future. In this paper, I hope to explore some of the implications of the differences posed by these two men.

It is my chosen profession to study the future. Let me say, however, that no one, myself included, can predict the future. There were times when the future at least seemed knowable, when the course of events was a bit more regular and the rate of change more slow. No one, today, knows where we are headed. This is not because there is inadequate attention paid to the future. We are all familiar with the popular expressions of that interest in the future. Let me assure you that a great deal of

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money is spent on far more arcane but less popular investigations of the future. I think our uncertainty has not to do with any lack of intelligence or insight on our part. It has much more to do with the fact that we are in the midst of a profound choice, a great change if you will. The future is genuinely uncertain and may not follow in any very clearly ascertainable way from our past. We may be in the midst of a profound wrenching and movement away from a course of our own history that is a millennium long. Before looking ahead, it is useful to look back a little, and perhaps even more than a little. I want to go back as much as eight hundred to a thousand years ago when western civilization embarked on a course which it has been on since. That trend, which Robert Heilbroner named the great ascent, I'd like to call the modernization trend. It consists of several particular components, all of which are interrelated.

The first component of this long-term trend is the scientification of knowledge. Until then, knowledge had come primarily from two sources, inner and outer subjective, that is personal, experiences. They were the product of the individual himself. Explanations were holistic and models teleological. Increasingly, however, because of the very power of scientific knowledge, science grew as the paramount source of knowledge. That was, of course, partially due to its powerful expression in technology. Scientific knowledge has as its primary characteristic its empirical nature. True knowledge is objectively varifiable. Precision in the form of quantification is most useful. When everyone agrees--that is that there is a collective decision as to the method of arriving at a particular datum--then that datum becomes truth. Explanations tend to be reductionistic and models deterministic. Values, in theory, should not enter into the question. The objective is prediction and control.

The second component is the secularization of human values. Until the evolution of that trend and even well into it, most values derived

from several sources. One such source was religion in various forms: religions which were experiential, for example--that is values were derived from inner experiences. A second source was tradition--my father always did it this way; the village has always done it this way. Another source was authority: the village elders, the pope, the ruler. Yet another source was the natural environment. However, increasingly, values were derived rationally around impersonal utilitarian values. Somebody sat down and figured them out. Contemporary ideologies in the form of free enterprise, democratic capitalism and Marxism, are the current extreme examples of the secularization of values.

The third aspect of this modernization trend was the dominance of economic rationality. The ultimate secular value is economics and especially modern scientific economics with its focus on things like econometric models and very elaborate decision-making structures. Exchanges which once were performed in the household and community (e.g., much food and clothing production, care of the aged) become commodities served out by large impersonal corporations. Other exchanges which remain in the household aren't counted in economic indicators (like the GNP)--and hence eventually seem psychologically to "not count." Thus, the housewife feels a pressure to "get a job," partly so her activities in the society will be counted.

Even more important in some ways is the steady encroachment of economic rationality into all aspects of societal decision making. Basic sociopolitical decisions at whatever level--community or national--involve noneconomic factors and often, explicitly or (usually) implicitly, basic metaphysical issues. Yet as the long-term trend has evolved, more and more these fundamental philosophical concerns have been overwhelmed by the apparent power of economic rationality. We have been persuaded that the most rational and politically satisfactory decision rationale involves incorporating as faithfully as possible all relevant factors

into an economic framework. Awareness of the extent to which this process distorts and corrupts human values has come to be largely suppressed. The question, "How much is human life worth in dollars?" has come to seem to be a meaningful question.

Economic rationality is characterized by concern for precision in putting relevant data in quantitative form; by emphasis on such quantifiable criteria as efficiency, productivity, and dollar cost per unit of output; by comparison of direct monetary costs and benefits in judging among alternatives. It focuses on how society chooses to employ scarce productive resources that have alternative uses. It handles the future rationally through letting future values have an appropriately discounted influence on present decisions. It is adaptable to handling uncertainty and risk through probabilistic methods (e.g., the probability of a devastating nuclear accident). Economics, of course, has had a very powerful impact on our society. This particular set of values has led, in great measure, to the wealth of modern industrial states and the levels of affluence enjoyed by its citizens.

The fourth component of this long-term trend was the industrialization of human activity. By this I mean the breaking down of activities into smaller and smaller components so that they can be aggregated into large assemblages of small activities. The values emphasized are economics of scale, optimization and serving mass markets. Today, not only do we have industrialization on the assembly line but we have industrialization of education and health care as well. Thus we can meaningfully speak of "overeducation" as if a person could learn too much.

Posed against these long-term trends might be a very different picture of human experience--that values ought to arise from transcendent sources, that knowledge is not only that which can be objectively verified but significant knowledge can arise from internal experience. The primary values of society may include economics but that a complex set of factors,

some of which are easily understood and quantified and others which are far more subtle and ineffable must also be included. And against the industrialization of work is the Greek concept of paedea, that work ought to contribute to a sense of meaning in life, the needs of society, and the growth of the individual. In agriculture and rural life the love of the land, the innate wisdom of the farmer, the small family farm all appear to be associated with the romantic image of farming in rural life long gone.

The contemporary structure of this very long term trend is being challenged. At the highest level a number of challenges of a global and national sort are arising:

- Apparent inability of the system to achieve promised levels of overall growth, industrial investment, productivity, balance of trade, and employment, together with satisfactorily low levels of inflation, pollution, taxation, and public borrowing;
- Accelerating urban decay and unmanageability of large cities;
- Increasing cost of environmental protection;
- Accelerating resource depletion;
- Overwhelming world population and food problems;
- Breakdown symptoms and escalating costs of service delivery systems (e.g., health care, mail, protection, insurance);
- Capital problems, including increasing need for capital and decreasing capital productivity, in large energy and resource projects;
- Collapsing money, in terms of its ability to purchase energy, raw materials, and replacement capital equipment--or almost anything else;
- Appearance of at least a half dozen major books and numerous articles on the decline of industrial capitalism;
- Appearance of signs which, in some societies in the past, have heralded major breakdowns and revolutionary change: alienation, purposelessness; lowered sense of community; increased rate of mental disorders, violent crime, social disruptions; increased public acceptance of hedonistic behavior, of lax public morality; increased fascination with diverse religious cults.

A second set of indications may be interpreted as signs of a nascent cultural transformation and accompanying institutional innovation. They include:

- Growing insistence on self-determination on the part of individuals, minority groups, ex-colonies, subcultures, women, communities;
- Increasing emphasis on quality of life as contrasted with status symbols, wealth accumulation, power of position, and materialistic goals;
- Movement toward "appropriate technology"--non-polluting, human-sized, community-promoting, resource- and energy-conserving;
- Increasing acceptance of an ecological ethic emphasizing man acting in partnership with nature in protecting the complex life-supporting systems of the planet; in modifying ecological relationships wisely; in husbanding resources appropriately; in establishing technological recycling mechanisms in harmony with natural ones; and in eliminating cancerous types of economic growth;
- Widespread search for transcendental meanings, evidences in new religiosity, in heightened cultural interest in self-discovery and matters of the spirit, and in scientific explorations of altered states of consciousness, biofeedback training, holistic health care, etc.

Let me focus, however, on the challenges relevant to the rural domain. There are today a growing number of farmers--many of them young--who go to farming not because it's a good business or because their fathers did it but because something very deep and spiritual within them compels them to enjoy a relationship with the earth and nature itself. That is their values are very different. Rather than economics, their focus is on ecological values. They see the challenge to contemporary agricultural practices that arise primarily because of growing ecological devastation and rising energy costs and the chaos produced by a very strange agricultural economic system. If they are not farmers, they value the rural life. Home vegetable gardening is growing rapidly. There is a slowly growing exodus away from the cities. These challenges are not yet

s real threat to the dominance and force of the long term trend. They are, however, an early indicator of imminent change. Obviously, agricultural production is rising. Economics is still the dominant force, and, especially with a rising global population, the demand for U.S. agricultural products will continue to grow. Canada, the United States and Argentina are the major food-exporting countries of the world. Especially at a time when we continue to need to import oil and other products from around the world, our agricultural products represent our best lever. The forces pushing agriculture in the directions taken in the last thousand years will continue very strong. However, there is a very real question as to whether our society and its agricultural system will continue to follow that long-term trend of western civilization or move in quite a new direction.

If we continue to follow the long-term trend, then one can anticipate that there will be fewer and fewer farmers, that farms, on the whole, will continue to grow in scale, and that economics will continue to grow in its dominance over rural life. If it is indeed true that our need for agricultural products will continue to grow, especially in national security terms, then we can expect agriculture to become increasingly rationalized. The independent and somewhat crazy farmer, the kind of diverse rural lifestyle that seems to be enjoyed today will be an increasingly vanishing way of life. We may be forced toward a kind of private collectivization of our agricultural system and the more rigid systematization of the entire structure.

On the other hand, we may be moving off that long-term trend. If that is the case, then we can see the movement toward smaller and smaller agglomerations of farms. People will live in smaller communities closer to food production systems. They will want to participate more in the growing of their own food and likely grow more--some at home, perhaps in small gardens and some in farms surrounding their small communities.

The implication of this direction is a less diverse diet than we enjoy today. That is we will transport food over long distances less frequently. Hence, our diet is likely to be more seasonal that it is today. This, of course, fits with a value of naturalism.

Now, in the very near future, it is quite clear that the agricultural system, to some extent, will be characterized by both of these directions. It is by no means clear that one or the other will dominate. However, it is quite clear also that the conflict between the two is quite profound. Farmer Turnquist and Secretary Andrus posed the issue well. And I honestly don't know which way it's going, but, in the long run, we will know whether Mother Nature is really a huckster or a god.